DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 087 740 SP 007 722

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TITLE What's in a Name? Competency/Performance/or Proficiency-Based Teacher Education.
PUB DATE 72
NOTE 6p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Definitions; Effective Teaching; *Performance Based Teacher Education; *Performance Criteria; *Semantics; *Teacher Education; Vocabulary
IDENTIFIERS *Proficiency Directed Teacher Education

ABSTRACT

There presently exists an ongoing debate in teacher education concerning the terms "competency-based," "performance-based," and "proficiency-directed." A closer examination of the meanings of these words suggests useful relationships among these terms rather than conflicts. The word "competent" denotes adequacy, suitability, and sufficiency while "proficient" means "performing with expert correctness or facility." This suggests competency-based certification but proficiency-directed teacher education. "Performance-based teacher education" refers to observable demonstrations of teaching knowledge and skill while "competency-based" refers to minimum standards and criteria. Performance-based teacher education focuses on objectives; competency-based teacher education focuses on criteria and standards. These terms are not mutually exclusive. Rather, exploration of both modes provides a process through which the central core and the parameters of competency/performance/proficiency-based teacher education can be identified and employed to improve education. (HMD)

ED 087740

A Working Paper
3-15-72

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Competency/Performance/or Proficiency-Based Teacher Education

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Whenever two educators meet these days, they often choose to call a new movement either competency-based or performance-based teacher education and to debate the merits of their choices. The purpose of this paper is not to engage in polemics nor to add to the definitions and jargon which confound the whole issue, but to speculate upon meanings and to suggest a relationship between the two terms.

Consider the Fiddle

When one analyzes the performance of a violin soloist at the symphony, certain skills become apparent. He must read music, properly handle the bow, be able to tune the instrument, and have a certain stage presence. So must the beginner at the seventh grade concert. The difference is in the criteria which are acceptable by decision-makers. What is more than adequate in one instance is unacceptable in another. Further, the seventh grader may be as adequate as the professional in many aspects of the performance; he may properly hold the bow and read music, and yet not be able to articulate these in the total performance.

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The parallel in teaching is obvious; the prospective teacher may perform adequately in asking higher order questions, establishing set, and writing criterion-referenced objectives, yet not be able to integrate these skills and employ them appropriately in given circumstances. Personal styles of demonstrating them lead to different but equally effective teaching strategies, just as violinists do not interpret works in the same way. Indeed the more competent the violinist the more likely he is to extend the interpretation and not rigidly and strictly interpret the music. Jascha Heifetz and Yehudi Menuhir do not play in the same way--but both are aclaimed for the expertise of their performances. They are virtusos. So it is with teachers. Master teachers do not perform alike. Our own research indicates that some teaching virtusos are pragmatists, some child-focusers, some task-focusers, yet all three are professional educators. One places major emphasis on the affective domain, is concerned with how children feel; the second emphases completion of tasks and projects; while the third considers situational variables in making decisions.* Bruce Joyce has described at least four functional emphases of

*Other teaching stances include Time-Servers, Contented Conformists, Ambivilents, and Alienated. For a report of the research, see Ann G. Olmsted, Frank Blackington III, and W. Robert Houston, Teacher Stances, unpublished manuscript, 1972.

teachers which require varied competencies: Diagnostic-Prescriptive Teacher, Affective-Supportive Teacher, Hypothesis-Laboratory Teacher, and Dialog Teacher. All teachers employ each of Joyce's styles at one time or another, but to varying degrees, depending on teacher personality and environmental context. With such a variety of teacher stances and styles (noted above, but known to anyone observing teacher behavior), it is doubtful that there is a single set of criteria which are useful to all teacher trainees.

Now, let us return to the analogy of the violinist. Note that the lowest level of performance demonstration was at the single skill level (correctly holding the bow, reading music, asking higher order questions). These were then combined into a performance and if the individual met stipulated criteria which were appropriate to the target and objectives of that performance (7th grade orchestra or New York Philamonic--concert or practice), he was judged competent. Note that a competent 7th grader is quite different from a competent professional violinist. Thus competence is situational (contextual). A parallel might be drawn between measurement and evaluation. One measures a performance but evaluates competence. In assessing a violinist, a diver, or a teacher's verbel interaction with children, rating scales, tests, observations or other instruments may be employed. They describe what is, while evaluation of those data consider the adequacy of measured phenomena within a context and value orientation.

Competence, too, is demonstrated over a longer period of time; a single performance is not an indicator of competence. Thus, a teacher's individual performance generally may be of such quality to be judged "competent", yet occasionally have poor performances. Competent athletes, speakers, or musicians all have "off days": so do competent teachers.

Teacher education programs thus are concerned more with competence than individual performance even though some judgments are necessary in assessing competence. Further, a program of teacher development is goal (or goals) oriented; and it lasts an entire lifetime. One seldom ever attains his goals because his goals change and evolve as he develops. Each individual, as Santaydma reminds us, chooses his own personal star. Teacher education, thus, should be directed to far ranging goals toward which the individual strives.

Competency-Based or Proficiency-Directed?

Related to the issue of performance-competency is one of quality of performance. When quality is considered the issue is whether competence is useful or whether we are really thinking of proficiency in teacher education.

Consider the dictionary definitions of each:

- Competent - properly or well-qualified; capable.
  2. Adequate for the purpose; suitable, sufficient.
  3. Legally qualified or fit; admissible.

- Proficient - Performing in a given art, skill, or branch of learning with expert correctness and facility...proficient implies a high degree of competence through training.

Considering the objectives of certification and teacher education, perhaps we should refer to competency-based certification and proficiency-directed teacher education. In the former, we are considering a base, a legal standard which tends to protect society from incompetents while the latter more nearly describes the scope, objectives, and structure of teacher education. The latter seeks to aid prospective and in-service teachers meet minimum certification standards, but it goes far beyond this, and it encourages teachers and the profession to seek maximum expertise. Further, while competency may refer to single minimum standards below which no one is acceptable, proficiency can be multi-dimensional, considering the varied needs of task focusers, child-focusers, pragmatists, and other teacher stances; dialog or diagnostic prospective teachers; urban or suburban environments.

Performance or Competence?

This paper was not intended to introduce new jargon into a confused situation, but to initiate a dialogue among educators which might clarify the situation. As I have talked to proponents of competency-based and performance-based teacher education terminology, it has become abundantly clear that they refer to the same movement. Performance-based refers to the way in which teachers demonstrate teaching knowledge and skills. That demonstration is observable (and their objectives are to "write," "do," "describe;" not "understand," "perceive," etc., which are non-observable). Further,

performance reminds us that knowledge of content and teaching strategies are not sufficient in teaching--overt action is important.

Competency-based, on the other hand, emphases a minimum standard; it adds criterion-levels and quality to the definition of the movement. Competency advocates note three levels for criteria--cognitive, performance, and consequence, and press for the latter as the real measure of effectiveness. Performance advocates, also recognizing consequence as the ultimate test of an individuals' effectiveness, point out that many intervening variables affect results (pupil ability, interest, motivation, availability of resources, etc.). They further note that, at the present state of our development, we emphasize performance rather than consequence, thus the name implies that emphasis.

Both performance-based and competency-based express important elements of the movement--one focusing on objectives, the other on criteria. Both are useful, not conflicting. Exploration of them provides a useful process through which the central core and parameters of competency/performance/proficiency-based teacher education are identified and employed to improve education.